

POETRY ANCIENT AND MODERN

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POETRY ANCIENT AND MODERN

James Francis *

Abstract

A collection of poetry written by James Francis between 1987 and 2015, previously published, self-published, and unpublished.

Key Words : Poetry, picture poetry, shape poetry, poetry concrete, imitations, experimental, haiku, chapbook, multilingual, Slovak, Japanese, “Mahoning Valley Poetry,” Bacchus Press, “Zyzzyva,” “Coachella Review,” University of California, Riverside, “Coachella Valley Poetry,” “Fifty-two Ideas for Poems,” “Seventy Ideas for Poems.”

The following poems were written between 1987 and 1994, and from 2001 to 2008. Roughly. (The last half-dozen pieces are brand-new, 2015 models, and included only for that reason. Novelty is its own reward.) The earlier ones were written in Ohio, in the United States, (and one from Slovakia,) and the later in California and Japan. By way of background. “Canzone dell’amore,” “We’re Always Open,” and “Leatherette” were originally published in “Mahoning Valley Poetry” (Bacchus Press, 1993.) “Doodles Doodled While Talking On The Phone” appeared, slightly differently, in the “Coachella Review,” (Spring 2013, University of California, Riverside.) “Bust of Bono” appeared in “Coachella Valley Poetry” (#2, 2003,) a chapbook series I produced. The others were included in a set of self-published chapbooks from 1988 and 1989, “Fifty-two

Ideas for Poems,” and “Seventy Ideas for Poems.” The Wilmot “treatment,” “Love Song,” was used for a Valentine’s Day card, circa 1990. (Which makes that “Mail Art.” Fun. This featured an illustration of Cupid with a machine gun, as I remember.) So I have anthologized myself, again. Good work, if...

Why “Ancient and Modern?” That’s just how they seem to me, and I like the ring of it– it peals a pleasing pomposity. Period pieces, perhaps. Late Twentieth Century American something. The turn of the Millennial. I don’t know what to call things, which may be why I write poetry.

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CANZONE DELL' AMORE

"ars est celare brevis"

Another night anaesthetized
 Face-down streets and spinning skies
 Forgotten sex
 and restaurant checks
 Streets to walk
 and mock
 and querelous talk, talk, talk.
 Don't ask what it's about—
 Let's go check it out.

On the bench the cronies cough and spit
 quoting T. S. Eliot.

Don't just sit there talkin' shit
 Let's go out and see what is it.

World enough and plenty of time
 to take a stand
 and change your mind.

Should I play "Aja" or "Eat a Peach?"
 I have heard the frogs croaking
 beach to beach.

I think they stick their tongues to me.

I should have been the shark in "Jaws"
 or a department store Santa Claus.

Perfume neck
 Welfare check
 Letters, rent
 "...not what I meant."

Barely crawl
 Against the wall
 Never call

Fuck it all

The cosmos drained from dripping bottles
 Drooling stubbled wattles
 Poisoned air and grasping breath
 We await red sirens to sound us to our depth.

ALOHA '90

You ain't nothin' but an Elvis impersonator
 Cryin' all the time
 You ain't nothin' but a old Elvis impersonator
 Baby cryin' all the time
 You ain't never shot a TV and
 You ain't no friend of mine

Said you's just like Elvis
 Well that was just a lie
 Said you's like Elvis
 Honey that was just a lie
 This Buick Regal ain't no limo
 T.C.B.
 D.U.I.

WE' RE ALWAYS OPEN

There's something about a waitress
 with an Appalachian "Honey" Bunn-
 O-Matic "Warm it up for you?"
 Thick ankles, dishpan hands and
 one black eye, purple, yellow,
 A loose strand, rosy cheeks, Kool Filter King.
 I like coffee, tea,
 pugilistic matrimony.
 Guess that fat plaid beard at home just had one
 too many refills.

LEATHERETTE

Linoleum, chrome
 Another cup of coffee

poem.

THE SCARLET “HEY!”

Hester, Hester, Hester Prynne
You can't do that
It's a sin

EPIC HAIKU

Odysseus'
siege stopped so he sailed home
Indirectly

MY FIRST PULITZER

Great American Novel!
Great American Novel!
It's right over there on the continental
shelf.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN V. ME

Not one million dollars, not a hundred or twenty or
five,
Not Washington, not Roosevelt or Jefferson, but one
lousy penny
short,
and this cashier gives me a look that could stop “Our
American Cousin.”

RANDOM RAP

Kick down the funk
Like a skateboard punk
Pierce the lobe
Not a homophobe

Rock the beat
All about the feet
Hands in the air

Hands don't care

Bust a rhyme
Fashion a line
Ahead of time
Teenage *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein*.

PLAYGROUND #1

Crybabycrybabycrybabycrybaby
Sticks and stones and gravel chainlink
Mitten lunchbox lice

TEMPO

The older stuff
First album
Early years
Yeah Yeah Yeah
ABC
Downhill
Sold out
Dinosaur

FLUNG

Shown off
Thrown off
Blown off
The old style like your
laundry pile

LOVE IS AN ACTION WORD

head over heels or is that
heels over knees?

PERMANENT PRESS PERCALE PRINT LOVE POEM

Call me a sentimental fool,

but I like the stains.

RANDOM RHYME

Submarine/always clean/seems green
like sardines under steam

OVER DC-7

A ladder leaning on an airplane wing:
seems misplaced, even though the idea
– ascent–
is the same...
...must be the best way to get the barnacles off.

SLAKING

Beer commercial beer commercial beer commercial
Coke Coke Coke Coke Coke
Spigot tap pop cap
Choke

MY POEM

Write your own.

TERRA DACTYL

“Earth Day.”
Earth tomorrow,
Yesterday.

MONDAY NIGHT 72 DEGREES

Porch swing
Porch swing
Porch swing
It's all I
od ot tnaw
Whoops!
On Tuesday afternoon

with you.

2 KNOTS

kites

in the sky like

HALF A HEART

it's FEBRUARY 14th
(St. Valentine's Day!)
Just a good excuse
to say “Hey!”
XXX
OO!
!!
!

O VACANCY

MOTEL

room room room room room room room

(empty)

pool

ST. FESTIVAL

Dancing to the a ccor di a n;
kissingk i s s i n gkissing
Catholic girls under
light bulbs strung out over the
Church parking lot.

DOLDRUM BEAT

The vast, bilious, billowless Bore
bore down more, more sore–

Riding, raining sheets of again and again–
It seemed to slow– to speed?– and then,
numbingly, to pour, encore

MAST

My love– the feeling, not the shes–
Blows through my frame a florid breeze
Red rose white and purple heat
Grown full, then empty, luffing sheet

TIDE

You weren't looking– it kept coming
You stood watch and still it came
Sunrise slice a heaving ocean
Trace the planets' retrograde motion
Stay your hand, fuse the sands, but
Slushing it slithers remains

EROSi

Spitting rain
Come sit by me
On blurring panes
Now, quietly
And dripping eaves
in this silent mist, soft whispering
On shuddering leaves
One kiss
Waiting
Gentle showers of flowering spring
Remember this
Like a slow tidal wave– still
Leveling.

MENTAL BLOC

What was I–
Tip of my–
How did–

I almost–
I wish I could–
Wait–

CHRISTMAS 1989

Christmas 1989
Grinch Peanuts Rudolph Bradys
Elvis' "Blue Christmas" on the radio
Elvis is blue, REPORTS TO THE CONTRARY
NOTWITHSTANDING
10 degrees, 0, negatives here in Ohio– wind chill
Kelvin
'89's almost over– so Jesus didn't come back this
year
But he wouldn't come back on his birthday–
big blowout in Heaven– funny hats and spanking
Six inches of powder overnight
A white christmas
In Heaven, are God and Mary still dating?
Beer bottles and wrapping paper
Underwear everywhere
Clean, wrapped
Eating meat and chocolate

LOVE SONG (RESTORATION STYLE)

All my past Life is mine no more,
The flying hours are gone:
Like transitory Dreams giv'n o're,
Whose Images are kept in store,
By Memory alone

The Time that is to come is not;
How can it then be mine?
The present Moment's all my Lot,
And that, as fast as it is got,
Dear
(Your name here)
is wholly thine.

Then talk not of Inconstancy
False hearts and broken Vows;
If I by Miracle can be
This live-long minute true to thee,
'Tis all that Heav'n allows.

(After John Wilmot, with apologies to "Phillis")

THAT MODEL YEAR

That muraled van thou mayst me in behold
when green pine, or tassles, or fuzzy dice, do hang
Upon that mirror reflecting doobies rolled,
Bootleg 8-track cartridges, where late Mick Jagger
sang.

On't thou see'st the twilight of such day
As airbrushed sunset fadeth in the west,
'76 Chevy, customized: everyone's impressed.
In it thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
That on the mattress of his youth doth lie,
As the ashtray wherein it must expire,
too small to be held by them it got high.
And tho' I know you dig it, man, the cargo doors are
lockin',
'cause if the van's a-rockin', don't come a-knockin'.
This then thou perciev'st, which makes thine
wheels more bad,
To ride well ere rusting, what's after all a fad.

1609/1993

(After William Shakespeare)

BOZK ZO SRANDY

Tvoje pery
ako mesiace na horizonte—
môj horizont— dvočatá pribúdajúce
sa lesknú
alebo ako zelenina
kvitne táto jar
ale— vieš—

nie zelená.

KISS FOR FUN

Your lips
like moons on the horizon—
my horizon— twin crescents
gleaming
or like vegetables
blooming this spring
but— you know—
not green

(from the Slovak)

EXP. ONLY

chances are mist
possibilities slipped
right past my last finger clasp
tried to strap on the mask
neck to nose with the rats
but now only the empty grasp lingers
gasp

tried to get tied
to the straight freight side
but the rails reeled on the gravel
sliding down the slag
brown paper stag
and my punch lines are all unravelled

hand to mouth
headin' south
where it's warm

any port
by the quart
in a storm

can't pick up the door

can't afford the floor
 my cars have all retired
 love to upgrade
 fade in the shade
 but my sunblock done expired

opportunity knocks
 and bondage stocks
 holding down my weight
 bootstrap feet
 on gravity street
 sticking up my rate

ends meet
 system beat
 pickin' trash

shopping cart
 quickie mart
 dumpster stash

the world's a beautiful place
 for a brutal race
 get up and get in line
 got a starting block on my athletic clock
 losing interest on my time

but i'll borrow a shoe
 kick it through the door
 work for food and beer
 sleep on a can
 scrape off my tan
 plod a new career plan
 man

BUST OF BONO

O, Sonny, we hardly knew ye!

I saw him today–
 Salvatore, second-generation son of
 Sicily, Motown and Hollywood;

a likeness not so like, a lackluster cover version:
 business casual in bronze,
 polyester perma-crease patina, (psychedelic not,
 the famous fur vest taken off to some museum...)

Whither now the beaded headband and
 feathered fringe,
 where the Cher of yore?
 (Now she's a sculpture too, as you knew.)

Look at you, tambourine man– a standing joke, the
 straight man, the corporate hippie; musician, actor,
 Reagan Republican: comedian. Any prescriptions
 in that pocket? Was it the booze or the downers, or
 just slippery old speed?

Your memorials are a dead stench of an accident
 of a toxic sea, a stretch of the concrete slab of
 8-laned Interstate 10, and light rotation on Eternity's
 top Classic 40, or top 100 All-Time Oldies...

You were Mayor here on the burning sand and
 died a Congressman, sliding high on the Tahoe
 snow, stopped by a tree almost like in an old
 cartoon, (but the trunk didn't bend out of your way,
 nor did you pass through, leaving a wood-grain
 silhouette cut- out...)

Come on, man– Bob Hope is still alive, Sinatra
 and Autry just died...

Didn't you know that alcohol and gravity don't
 mix?

Needles and pines, packed powder; you made
 your mark in your notable ascent, and your passing
 left a void like a missing beat, the spinning black-
 hole end of an old 45, or the eerie silence of a resort
 community in the off-season...

We cannot hear the sound, the brain-rhythm-
 pounding drums, save a few old songs and the dull
 cymbal-like ding of this base cast, cannot know the
 vision of the quick eyes but from laugh-tracked
 reruns and the yearly Film Festival, truly a gift...

Here, in the hands extended, bright as two new
 pennies from sitting sightseers' asses, we feel a
 touch of the vitality, a shadow of the star. The

strong nose gleams, shiny from tourists' rubbing
for good luck, like Buddha's belly over
Groucho's moustache.

Your final appearance at St. Theresa's occasioned
honking lines of limousines and flocks of luminaries,
and the familiar lenses focused tight, ringing your
gold-tone "Palm Springs Walk of Fame" star, not so
far from this very statue, by the abandoned bank,
across from the Somebody Memorial Library, the (I
Love) Lucy statue, and the Rolex clock...

An easy target-- the nacho-stuffed pigeons are
circling--

We should all be so funny.

Du mu ßt dein Lied ändern, babe.

DINNER CLUB

Everything was perfect, italicized like a menu:
sipping a fine vintage saxophone-- French, silver--
followed by a few shots of trumpet--
almost mariachi, but not brassy--
muted, with lime, and I can see you now,
smiling around the green rind...

Candles play low in fishnetted red globes,
licking little lights dancing, lissome and languid on
linen...

The orchestration of the weather was perfect, too:
the subtle crescendo of pressure and slight
diminuendo in temperature--
you move closer not because you're cold, even in
that old standard,
melody of a warm breeze, salivatory, redolent of the
sea,
fresh grass, charred meat and rosemary,
gasoline and tobacco...

The appetizer of neck of you was divine,
and how keenly I recall nibbling
carefully

teasing
around the gold ring upon your earlobe.

Bite me again.

Louder.

THE UNICORN UPON HIS TAPESTRY

Warp and weft, deft shuttlecock,
twisting threads of Life illumine:
The dimpled, wimpled Maiden fair,
cum mythologic, wave-maned Groom.

A cloister safe, yon leafy glen, em-
broidered with a thousand flowers,
the myrtled girdled et equine sublime,
supine twined 'neath verdant bower.

Spiral horned, goateed Steed,
of spotless, unsurmounted race,
steadfast, gazes, yet but gently neighs,
is Guardian of the precious Chaste.

(This is of a surety, yet never tires he of Purity?
Sooth, the Virgin tames the Beast, but shall ne'er
Animal be released?
Do his long-pent thoughts never thither-ward travel,
whither the tight-bound mesh might be rent or
unravel?)

Betimes, perchance, (while Maidenhead naps,) he dreams of his horn, or horns, mayhaps,
(his curly-lashed eyes, fantasizing, near shut,
might fain fix a scene of the Stud and the Rut,) his horn teasing out the repetitive pattern,
he dreams of a patch of an unbridled slattern,
a right black stain of a proper slut.

(Upon a famous rug,
depicting a bestial hug,
made at Brussels, c.1460 A.D.

From the French.)

Edo, Cipangu
MMVII

DOODLES DOODLED WHILE TALKING ON THE PHONE

stretchy spiral cord.

a circle, with 2 dots and a curve inside: "happy
face." a tiny
triangle and a curved line at the bottom make it a
happy face balloon.

puffs of clouds, then flying sheep.

a triangle, angled again into a pyramid. dots of
sand.

an oval, with a shaded "lip" inside, like a manhole,
with an arrow coming out.

a wavy line, nothing, with perpendicular lines
depending therefrom.
shading makes drapery, or corrugated metal, or the
aurora borealis.

this could be a fish but it's in the shape of your
eye. lash-like
fins and tail, and circles for bubbles.

a squid is a little arrow, a little fireworks rocket with
suction-cup
legs. ink blot.

this face has an asterisk and a spiral for eyes.

a sphere can be many things; this one is not.

cube. cube. legs, arms, antennae and screen: TV

man, with power
cord tail. nothing on.

a sphere with three legs is a capacitor, a disc with
two legs is a
resistor. they fight with lightning bolts. electricity.

this line is the horizon, the one above it is the
mountains. short
verticals make telephone poles, connected by
curves of lines.

this t-shirt is yours, these curves are your breasts. I
can't do you justice.

a crescent: banana, smile, or moon?

airplane.

I miss you.

ZUSHI CRAB

Far from the sea,
(and across a hazardous Pacific coast highway,) a little crab scuttles
sideways on the hot pavement;
freezes when he sees me;
then, having completed an antennae-tip-twitching
calculation,
scuttles again,
to a cranny
between a stone wall and a wooden gate...

Why are you here on this street, on any street,
dodging cars and scooters and feet?

Tired of the beach?

I philosophize, (and autoanthromorphize,)

and wonder if I'm somehow like this peregrinationating
crustaceanate,

(fiddling around in Japan, far from home, out of my

element, et alia, et alien, et cetera,)

but,

no,

my claws are much less effective and my eyes aren't
on cool wiggly stalks.

Zushi, Kanagawa, Nippon

IX '08

AKI NO HAIKU (AUTUMN HAIKU)

1.

秋の雨

明後日、昨日、今日も

川の空

Aki no ame

Asat te, kino, kyo mo

Kawa no sora

Autumn rains

Today, yesterday,

and the day before

The sky is a river

2.

小蝶と小蝶

てんてんとする影

石の色

Ko cho to ko cho

Ten ten to suru kage

Ishi no iro

Two tiny butterflies

Flitting shadowly

The color of rock

3.

ちいさな葉っぱ

黒猫の目は

木のすきま

Chisana happa

Kuro neko no me wa

Ki no sukima

Small leaves

Black cat's eyes

Through a tree

木のすきま

黒猫の目は

緑の葉

Ki no sukima

Kuro neko no me wa

Midori no ha

Through the branches

Black cat's eyes

Leaf green

4.

秋風に

トンボの手ぬぐい

はためいて

Akikaze ni

Tombo no tenugui

Hatameite

Autumn wind

Dragonfly scarf

Fluttering

5.

夜の散歩

セミの音楽は

霞む森

Yoru no sanpo

Semi no ongaku wa
Kasumu mori

Forest walk
Cicadas' music is
Mist in the night

LANDSCAPE PERSPECTIVES

or

set?

sun sun
 rise

(purely a question of location)

Tokyo, September 2015
